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Oral History Interview: Mr. and Mrs. Eli Mullins

Eli Mullins

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(Signature - Interviewee)

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Date April 13, 1976

Eli Mullins
(Signature - Interviewee)

Box 1
Address

Ikes Fork, W. Va. 24845

Date April 13, 1976

Dorothy Lester
(Signature - Witness)

Eli Mullins of Ikes Fork, W.Va. was interviewed on April 13, 1976. The subjects covered included his former employment as a miner, logger, and constable; his activities of farming, religion, ginsenging, horse trading and moonshining. His unusual experiences covered were; The Battle of Blair Mountain in Mingo County, West Virginia; Mother Jones, a UMW organizer; a payroll robbery at Warren Cliff in Mingo County, West Virginia; a political rally in Pineville, West Virginia, when William Marland was a candidate for governor; a counterfeiter in Virginia named Money-making Jack; being under indictment in Virginia for firing at law enforcement officers; and living at a coal camp.

Mr. Mullins is characteristic of the men of Southern West Virginia of his time. He is very proud of his family and its background, which is shown in much of this interview.

Both sides of one tape was used and part of 1 side of another tape. The recorder was turned off twice while the interview was in progress because of outside interference. Mr. Mullins was hard of hearing and some questions were not understood or had to be repeated. Occasionally there were pauses for thinking or to spit tobacco.

People mentioned in the interview include; Herbert Honaker, President Hoover, Mother Jones, a Rose fellow, a Baldwin man, Greenway Hatfield, Chief Cline, Harris Caulder's brother, old man Trail, President Roosevelt, Wally Barron, William Marland, Bob Bailey, Blackjack Mullins, Irene, a Flemings, Jim Miller, White Mullins, Bill Mullins, Clara Mullins Lester, Uncle Bill, a Blankenship, Uncle Squire, Uncle Ambros, a Cooper, A Stacy, Bob Gross, Arch Horne, Willa Mullins Trail and Ben Jackson.

Places mentioned covered three states. Those from West Virginia were; Johnny Cake Mountain, Vera Poca, War Eagle, Warren Cliff, Tug River, Ben Creek, Mercer County, Huff Creek, Pineville, Bradshaw, Wolfpen and Iaeger. Those from Virginia were; Wise County, Dixon County, Cumberland Mountains, Clintwood, Poor Valley, Buckeye, Jewel Ridge and State Line Ridge, which runs between Virginia and West Virginia. Those from Kentucky were; Lower Elk and Woodman.

Dorothy Lester

DL: Uh, during the depression, how did you make your living?

EM: Uh, farmed. You got it wrote down?

DL: Uh, huh. Go ahead and tell us.

EM: I farmed, worked what few, what, if I could get to work on a job about 1 or 2 days. Sometimes 1 day and a half. I farmed, traded, and, and made out with what, what I could get hold of.

DL: Did you work in the mines at that time?

EM: Yeah, I worked, tram coal here. You would say in the mines.

DL: What was "blocking up?"

EM: That was, uh, uh, wasn't, say they'd run today and it was a twelve mile train, and uh, they'd load coal and next day we'd put that coal up the mountain here so that they could take it out then to the mines the next day, you know, called a block day. We'd take it time about. I'd help block today and next time I blocked, why, the other crew would take it and give them an extra day then. And then I'd, I could use mine here all the time but I'd give to a fellow. Give it to Herbert Honaker, lived here up on the mountain. And I had a big family and I'd give him my day once in a while. Help him out, I, I farmed and took corn to the mill on a horse and got bread and milked cows and had hogs and I done a whole lot. I'd trade alot, swapped horses.

DL: Did you get any assistance from the government?

EM: Not a dime.

DL: Did anyone else get anything that you might remember?

EM: No, wasn't nothing going then.

OM: (Inaudible).

EM: Yeah, they, uh, I never got none but they come in that little, what was that first come in? Hoover got it out.

OM: Was it commodity?

EM: It was commodity. And . . .

OM: Or something like that.

EM: Some . . .

OM: You got one box.

EM: . . . got it.

OM: Got one box.

EM: Uh, you can't remember it. And they'd appoint a man to handle it and give it, give it, give away. I never did get, never did apply.

DL: Uh, what do you remember about the Battle of Blair Mountain?

EM: Well, I didn't go. I lined up to go once. They fit in there for I don't know how many trying to organize. You remember, when they was trying to organize? They fit in there. That was 19, they fit in 1912. Had a rally and then they come in about, when did the, when did the union come in? What . . .

OM: Honey, don't, I can't, I wouldn't be . . .

DL: Was that 1921 when it happened?

EM: That was, uh, they had a battle then but, uh, then they had a battle the last round they made. They had two battles in there. And, uh, let's see. The last one was, uh, where did I live? It was before I come to Vera Poca. And the social security

come in 1926. It was thirty, thirty six, wasn't it?

DL: I don't really know. Uh, what about Mother Jones? What, uh, did she do?

EM: She was a woman, and organize. She come out of Pennsylvania. And about the first one ever you seen wear britches. And she went, fit, and organized.

OM: Tried to feed them.

EM: And was shot at, whipped and everything else. And her name is in them journals yet, buddy. She's dead now.

DL: Did you see her?

EM: Yeah, seen her once.

OM: Tried to feed the miners.

DL: Did she give speeches or what?

EM: Yeah, she'd make speeches and go and all trying to organize. Go right in camps and go everywhere

DL: Was she someone's, uh, wife who was a United (inaudible)?

EM: I don't know where she was married. Never did know. But boy she wasn't scared of nothing.

OM: Was she the one that (inaudible)?

DL: Would you say that she helped the United Mine Workers to organize?

EM: She helped. She was the main stem of it. Done more than any of the rest of them ever done. She was down here on, uh, War Eagle one time, and uh, and they was a fight, and uh, she went in a garden to help, uh, a woman get some to cook to feed them miners, you know, where they was . . .

OM: It was potatoes, wasn't it?

EM: . . . laying out fighting. And they'd shoot right beside her. She'd just went on and gathered it and went and cooked it anyhow. Never paid no attention. They was trying to bluff her, you know.

DL: Uh, huh. Uh, how did the United Mine Workers help the miners around here? Do you remember a great change?

EM: It took a load off of them in that panic when they, they worked men for nothing. They loaded coal right up here a dollar a car and the first one they run over the scales was seven ton. Men loading seven ton of coal at one dollar. Then they put it on a tonnage base, you know, so much a ton, and raised my wages from, uh, three sixty to seven, seven something.

DL: A day or, uh, . .

EM: And cut it down from fourteen hours to eight.

DL: That was your wage for the whole day?

EM: They generally worked me, they would quit time up here, they'd say, "You fellows put up so many more cars up the mountain here," six percent grade. After they'd get done, the miners would go in and if there was a wreck or something it was twelve or one o'clock before they got in. There wasn't nothing you could do. The other jobs were doing the same thing. Just had you under bondage, that was all.

DL: Were there very many wrecks?

EM: Yeah, we had lots of wrecks.

DL: What caused those?

EM: Well bad track most of the time, and uh, cars get wore out, you know, and uh, brakes get bad on them,

and uh, they couldn't go off the mountain on the inside. I took a trip off one time, and uh, the brakes were bad on the dinky, wouldn't hold and the superintendent was on there, uh, they jumped off, him and the other fellow, a Rose fellow, and he, and, I was firing that day and said, "Let Eli take it off, I'm kinda sick." He didn't want to take it off of that mountain. I got on there. I said, "Ain't nothing wrong with it," told the superintendent. I said, "He's just scared of that mountain." I rode it down there and (inaudible) I couldn't stop it. Threw sand under. Done everything I could do. I just stepped off, let it go roll on. Superintendent come on down said, "What's the matter, Eli?" I said, "Nothing." He said, uh, I said, "No brakes on that (inaudible) I watched them up there and made a report on it once." I said, "Never fixed the brakes. No brakes on the car. You're about to get done and you won't do nothing for the brakes. Can't hold. I'm going to take care of it myself." Brake, brakes to the locomotive.

DL: Your job, uh, then was running a dinky?

EM: Yeah, I run a dinky.

DL: What exactly was that?

EM: That's a locomotive like on a railroad.

OM: You fired it.

DL: You fired it. Is that right?

EM: I fired first, broke first, fired, and then run it. Build up, just like a railroad.

DL: That hauled coal out of the mines?

EM: Hauled coal, 12 mile tram.

DL: Did you haul coal out of the mines anyother way?

EM: Yeah, when I first come here I, I hauled coal, uh, by mule, ponies, till they got the dinky in. I don't know, about six months. Then I worked on that tram on them locomotives the rest of the time. And when I got done I, a fellow come up in here to get them pillars they had left in there and I worked four years. Two years for him (inaudible) my boss then. I, they set in here again here, another company did and I worked and hauled with an old mule. I had no electric. And got done with that. Worked till I was sixty five. Then I helped build tipples, build houses, carpenter work for I don't know how many years, construction work they called it. Had to get by. I couldn't work in the mines and draw my miners pension, you know.

DL: Uh, tell me about the payroll robbery at Warren Cliff.

EM: Uh, N&W come up Tug River and you go up at Warren Cliff. There was a mines back in there and the railroad had a line laid up in there to get, haul coal out of there. And these superintendent and a payroll man that worked in the office and a doctor went out to get the money down here at the depot to take it up in there to pay off their men.

OM: Was that where the men got up on a log and crowed like a rooster?

EM: Yeah, and uh, you come from Glen Allan and cross on to Ben Creek and they was, they was five Italians and they never did know where they was from and they shot them and when they throwed them up on the platform down there to, uh, to, uh, station brought them out of there and bones fell out of their clothes where they had shot them. And they come across on to Ben Creek. I know just exactly how they come. Crossed over there and come up, dodged that school over there and went up a hollow and right back in the head of it they was a, uh, hazelnuts and, uh, a big white oak had fell and I guess it was four foot through, looked like. Course it was nearly rotten when I seen it

and worked in there. That was years later. And a big rock, it was a great, oh, it was a, and uh, that tree had fell right down beside that rock and that made a, uh, hiding place in there. And they stayed in there, I believe it was five days and they had guns and everytime they aimed to go in there to them they'd pluck off one. They killed a sheriff, they killed a Baldwin man. It was seven of them, of them, uh, got killed. The five Italians and they killed a Baldwin man, and uh, and I believe old Greenway Hatfield of Mercer County was the sheriff. And they finally laid awake and kept shooting in there and they killed them all but one and, and uh, old Chief Cline over here went down there, and uh, he said that one, one morning it was breaking daylight. Said he made a noise like a rooster flapping its wings and crowing, and uh, had that money and had it divided out in there, and uh, and never spent none. Hadn't been nowhere to spend it, you know. And, uh, and when they was shooting in there, they shoot them high powered rifles through that log. Couldn't shoot through that cliff, you know. He stacked them bodies up, them four, to protect him in there. They had, uh, some kind of a 22 rifle, a shotgun, and uh, and uh, they finally killed him and brought them out and had, uh, old fellow Cline lived down the mouth of the hollow. They brought a doctor down there and when they'd shoot out of there and hit one and didn't kill him, they'd take him down there to the doctor . . .

OM: Was it old Doc Richardson?

EM: I, I believe it was, if I'm not mistaken. And kept him there two or three days and nights and they was one boy climbed a tree. I knowed him. He was a Harris Caulder's brother. What was that youngest one's name?

OM: Honey, I don't know.

EM: He worked there some. He was smart and wanted to go there to help and kill these fellows. They

wanted me to go and everybody was get your gun to go.

DL: Was it kinda like a posse?

EM: Yeah. And that old boy clumb a, a tree to aim to peep in there to see what kind of a place it was and what, uh, how, how they was hid, you know. And boy they shot that son of a bitch through the cheek and he fell out of that (laughter).

DL: How much money did they steal?

EM: Twenty, if I ain't mistaken, it was twenty three hundred dollars.

DL: And when was that? Do you remember?

EM: It was twenty one if I ain't mistaken. I lived at Lower Elk.

DL: You lived where?

OM: Woodman, Kentucky.

EM: That was Woodman, Kentucky at that time.

OM: Called it Lower Elk.

EM: They tried to get me to go. Begging everybody to go. I was busy. Wouldn't let me off or I'd have went. I didn't have (inaudible), I'd have went if I got a chance.

DL: How many days did it take them to kill all of them?

EM: Uh, about seven days. They stayed in there. I don't think they ever had a bite to eat. Couldn't find nothing. They got the money and killed them all and they tried to find out in the shop. You take a auger when they used to bore through coal and if that auger got dull, they'd, blacksmith spread it out and trim a little off of it and then put the right roll on it to bore, you know. And they was little slugs that he cut off and they

took that shot gun and took the shots out and put them in the shells and shot them things and they bound to been around some mines and they wasn't a paper on them. They wasn't nothing. They was all Italians. Looked like from what they could tell, little Southern Italians. Black. Northern Italians ain't black. Southern is. One time they was a fellow, uh, he was a some kind of a Woppie. I don't know what he was. Worked here (inaudible) and he was from, uh, Northern Italy. He was a Italian. Talked pretty good, you know. And old man Trail asked him said, uh, "Do you got any niggers over there?" He said, "Yeah, uh, he sea gone." That's what they called a nigger. Said he, he, that's a Southern Italian, said, "He sea gone allright." Said, "Sea gine, sea gone." Said, uh, "He not sea gone like this sea gone but he sea gone, allright." Said, he said, "What do they do?" Said, "Don't do nothing but play fiddle and steal chickens" (laughter).

DL: Uh, when you were a constable do you remember arresting someone and, uh, shooting a gun out of their hand?

EM: Yeah.

DL: Tell me about that.

EM: Well, uh, it was me and another constable went to, uh, it was a, they was, uh, they sold liquor. Wasn't, uh, and I don't know what and all they done. And, uh, a fellow come after me and him. We was out on the road and told us they was a fighting down there in that beer joint. We went and they'd kinda slowed down and this fellow said he'd done so and so and said he got a pistol and I told him he was under arrest and he said, uh, "Well, don't take it off of me in here." And the other fellow walked out with him (inaudible) but when he got out there he jerked and this fellow grabbed him and was a wrestling him and holding his arm, you know. He was a shooting. And he couldn't get his hand off of that, it was a, a squeezer. The hammer was on the inside of it and he hollered for me to come

and help him and I run and I fell and he shot and knocked my eyes full of sand. Hit right close to my (inaudible) and I kept talking to him and he had, uh, shot it empty and hadn't never hit nothing with it and I caught his hand out there and I had a 45 and I shot his thumb off and he dropped it. I could have shot him and I didn't. I hit him with the gun under here and knocked the breath out of him. It was a heavy gun. Took him and put him in jail. I took him to the doctor and had it dressed, fixed up. Went and brought him out for trial and they give him six months for the pistol and I don't know. I took the pistol and, uh, fined him.

DL: Where did this happen?

EM: I (inaudible) twenty six, thirty six, when Roosevelt was in.

DL: Where?

EM: Huff Creek District (inaudible). Took a fellow's place (inaudible) was elected. Served two years then four years. Elected six years.

DL: Do you remember going to, uh, Democratic rallies?

EM: Pineville? Yeah, that was when, what year was that now, when Barron was elected? Wally Barron?

DL: Uh, huh.

EM: Didn't say it right.

DL: Are you talking about, uh, Barron or Marland?

EM: It was, uh, it was Barron, Wally Barron, Barn, Barron, ever what it was. Or was it Marland? I missed that. I believe it was Marland, when Marland was running.

DL: Did you always ride your mule over there?

EM: No. I just took it that time. (Inaudible)

DL: Why? Why did you take your mule?

EM: They wanted me, wanted me to take it, a rally and put ribbons on it and ride it through town and pull off a big one, you know.

DL: Uh, huh.

EM: After it was, uh, they accused me of being drunk but I wasn't. I never drunk a drop. I believe I had been baptized. I never drunk a drop of liquor. Just rode that mule and pulled off a big one.

DL: What did Marland ask you to do?

EM: Promised me a Stetson hat and never did give it to me.

DL: Why was he going to give you a Stetson hat?

EM: Uh, he said he would give me one of them big blue cowboy hats if I'd do that.

DL: Do what?

EM: Ride that mule through there. Decorate and ride it. Oh, I had ribbons all over it, you know.

DL: You mean ride the mule through town?

EM: Yeah.

DL: Did he ask you to ride it anywhere else?

EM: No. I just, wanted me to ride it up to old Bob Bailey's and ride it in the house. Wanted me to ride it through the courthouse (laughter).

DL: Did you ride it through the courthouse?

EM: No. I just rode it in and (inaudible) if it done a good job in the courthouse it would have been the best thing ever was, wouldn't it?

DL: (Laughter) what can you remember about, uh, Money Making Jack or Blackjack that lived in Virginia? Was he a counterfeiter?

EM: Huh?

DL: Was he a counterfeiter? Did he make money?

EM: Yeah, yeah. They was, they was two bunches of them Mullins. One was a moonshining bunch and the other a counterfeiting bunch. And they was different. They wasn't no relation some way. And all my people on your side and mine, they come from Wise County, Virginia and Dixon County. Blackjack, they got some up a few years ago. They still making it. I went back in there and went back on that Cumberland Mountain in there, me and a fellow hunting for a squirrel dog. And they was Mullin's and they had married Mullin's and they had the finest brick homes that every you seen. Come out from Clintwood back up in there. And I found one, one family that we went to that day was a Flemings and she was a Mullins, and I asked her, I said, "Old Black Ike," I said, "He used to come to my daddy's when I was here a cousin of my daddy," I said. She said, she said, "He was my grandpa." And they had good houses, good farms and the best people ever you see. Used to be mean, you know. Uh, no matter what time of day, wanted you to eat, and uh, some of them was religious and we bought a dog off of them (inaudible) and, uh, one of them Mullin's run a garage there in town. He told us to go out there. Said, "He's a Mullins." Said, "What he tells you about a dog is alright." And Jim Miller, I, I had one. Jim Miller, fellow with me, he bought the dog. Give a hundred dollars for it. It was a good one.

DL: Did you ever see them making the money, or did you ever get any of it?

EM: Huh, uh. No, uh, I made moonshine liquor though.

DL: Tell me about that.

EM: Huh. I made it right here.

DL: Did you sell it?

EM: Yeah.

DL: Did anybody ever . . .

EM: I never was up. They never did get me up for it.
I got by, I was pretty smart (laughter).

DL: What did you, uh, did you use some of the moonshine
yourself, some of it?

EM: Yeah, I drank some. I never drank too much. I
made it when I was a boy. That's all I knowed.
When I grewed up I made liquor. Back then you
could just make it and you wasn't bothered. Oh,
revenue come in once a year and make a round or
something. I made it here. Had it right in that
panic. You'd get a two dollar bill once in a while
for that moonshine.

DL: Why did you stop making it?

EM: Well, I tell you, tell you, why I stopped making it.
I went back to what you call mash end to make my
beer. Took some sugar and stuff and I got up to it
pretty close and got to studying that I could live
without it and I'd get in trouble. I stood around
a few minutes, brought that stuff back and never
did make no more.

DL: Do you remember the year, about?

EM: What time was it when we moved in here?

OM: We've been here about forty five years and I don't
know that.

EM: Let's figure that out now.

DL: It would be in the thirties, wouldn't it?

EM: Yeah. It was in the thirties.

DL: Okay, that's good enough. Can you tell me about some of your experiences at a jockey ground?

EM: Yeah. She followed me one time (laughter).

DL: What did she see?

EM: Uh, (inaudible) I never stayed but if I ain't mistaken, that I told her I'd be back but twice in my life, and I went to Bradshaw to a jockey ground and we drunk liquor, me and White Mullins, and got balled up and never got back till next day and I took a trip, me and him, and went over to Virginia. Rode a horse to (inaudible) and we got us, took the saddle pockets full of liquor. As we went and got some when I got there, and uh, I, you know where Turkey Branch is? I got up on top of that mountain, it was four o'clock in the evening, and uh, we stopped and I said, "Let's go home." At nine thirty I put my, I had a saddled horse. I put him in the barn out there, rode it home. I couldn't ride that way now at all.

DL: Did a horse ever, uh, hurt you?

EM: Yeah. I've been throwed a few times. Bruised up, not broke up, now. Ever I get my foot in the stirrup one time, I can get on his back, I don't care how wild he is.

OM: What did that mule do when you shot it?

EM: Huh?

OM: What'd that mule do when you shot it?

EM: That one? I was whipping it and it stepped. I tied it up to whip it and it stepped on my foot.

OM: Got loose and took . . .

EM: And I kept whipping it and it broke the rope. Started down to Irene's house. I got my pistol and shot at it

and tried to kill it.

DL: How often did you go to the jockey ground?

EM: Pretty often.

DL: Just whenever you needed to trade or . . .

EM: Yeah, and they'd come here. Trucks come in. I'd go and they'd come here and do alot of trading, you know. People come here and do it. Breed horses and I'd trade and raise cattle and sold them.

DL: How about knives? Did you trade knives?

EM: Yeah, I swapped knives everytime I got a chance.

DL: Did this happen at the jockey grounds sometimes?

EM: Yeah. They had everything. Liquor, horses . . .

DL: Guns?

EM: Knives, guns . . .

DL: Did you ever feel like somebody, uh, . .

EM: Cheated me?

DL: . . . cheated you?

EM: Oh yeah. I got cheated many, and uh, I got cheated in a swap and knowed I was getting cheated in the swap. I figured I could make it on the next deal, you know.

DL: Did you ever cheat anybody else?

EM: Huh? Oh yeah, and they've cheated me too. Worst cheating I ever got my uncle give it to me.

DL: On a horse?

EM: On a horse and he was old and I was young, you know,

and I had a good horse. He had a seven year old and I couldn't see a thing in the world wrong with it. Mine was old and, uh, I didn't know if mine would work or not. I swapped to him and it would take spells every month. Called it a mooneyed. He'd go nearly plum blind about every, I, uh, every once in a while. He could see a little, you know. He could see enough, he could see something way on ahead of it and go to raising it's feet to get over that before it got to it, and he'd, he'd put it on me that time.

DL: Do you remember, uh, the time in Virginia when they indicted you? What was that for?

EM: Shooting, pistol.

DL: Why were you shooting a pistol?

EM: I was just drunk and mean.

DL: Who were you shooting at?

EM: I didn't shoot at nobody. Shot in the ground, trying to get the law to bother me so I could kill him.

DL: Why did you want him to bother you?

EM: He killed her cousin and I didn't like it. Didn't like him no how. I allowed he might try to arrest me or something for going to kill him. But they got gone when I shot. I had four more in it. I knowed that was enough. They all run. They was big cowards. They gathered up when that train come. I went on to her daddy's. Stayed all night. Got on the train the next day and come in back to Lower Elk. Then I come to West Virginia and I'd go back over there but they wouldn't bother me. I'd dodge them, you know. Finally died, I reckon.

DL: Why did they kill her cousin?

EM: He was a, I never did know. My daddy was right

along and he was shooting on the highway. That's a violation of the law, and this fellow got on his horse, they was riding horses. This fellow got on his horse, said he seen him shooting in the highway past his house. Didn't like it, you know. They'd had trouble. He fired in the road up beside of him. Shot him. Took advantage of him. Got by with it. He was smart and mean, uh, he was a Mullins. Bill Mullins.

DL: How did you learn to, uh, read?

EM: Learned it myself.

OM: Did Clara help?

EM: She helped me, my daughter.

DL: How about writing? Did you do that yourself?

EM: I can't write. I can sign my name and . . .

OM: That's about all he knows.

EM: Went to school a few days to a fellow and I never did get nowhere. Little old log house, a bunch of us. Oh, went maybe a week or two, and uh, daddy never did send me to school. Had something to do, work (inaudible) old people said didn't need no education. Need how to learn to farm and plow a horse. Yeah. My daddy was the only one in the whole bunch that could read and write.

DL: How did he learn?

EM: Learned himself, himself. Rest of them didn't know one letter from the other. Made a living. Some of them lived good and had good farms and lived good.

DL: Did your dad read the Bible?

EM: Yeah (break in tape). Married a Blankenship and lived down there, state line ridge. That mean bunch down in there. And uh, old Uncle Bill, he

married a Blankenship. Old Uncle Squire married a Stacy. My daddy married a Cooper and old Uncle Ambros, my uncle, he had a white beard down to here when I first ever seen him, remember him. He married his double cousin.

DL: Do you remember how you got religion or how you first came to know the Lord?

EM: Yeah.

DL: Would you tell me about that?

EM: Yeah. I got to studying about, oh, right smart a bit before I ever confessed or done anything. I knowed if I died in my sins in hell I'd life up my eyes. I still preach that and talk it and I can back it up by the Bible. I was going to the field and had somebody helping me, two of them, and I kept studying as I went along out there and studying as I went and they was talking. I'd talk but I had in mind and studying about it. (Inaudible) had a field. I told them to go on up there. I'd be there d'rectly and I just, that old house out there where, was you ever up in there? Yeah, you went up that hollow riding one time. (laughter). I got out of their sight and I got down on my knees and I said, "Well, I'll get right. I won't go to no church." She was going to church. I went about a week and had a mule and it got out and I couldn't catch it and I cussed up a storm. (Laughter) went over home and kept studying. I'd think to myself, "What'll I do?" I went to church. Some fellow talking to me first night and I got away from him next night.

OM: Would that be old man (inaudible)?

EM: Uh, no. I went to the alter, and I prayed and I kept praying and kept praying. I said, "Lord, take my life." I got in such a shape I just didn't know what in the world. I wanted to die. And I said, "Here I am." Something moved upon me and I come out of there. Everybody's face looked like a ghost.

I know when I was born again. Spirit. Nobody don't have to tell me. And I grabbed everybody. The other fellow's wife and mine and anybody and hugged them. (Laughter) and, uh, I knowed I had something I never experienced before and, uh, religion is the same (inaudible). I've had experiences with that many years and studied it. Uh, it's a change of mind and a change of heart. Exactly. All there is to it. It ain't no great big something, uh, uh, falling out and a big lot to it. I know. I've had the experience and, uh, the Bible said, "No man knows except the one receiving, and his name is wrote on a little white stone." It's five times in there, it spoke about the name wrote in the Lamb Book of Life. Spoke five times in that Bible, I believe. It might be six. But I got it five times. And over in Revelations (inaudible) a book open and another book and that a sixty six approximate in the New Testament. And all that ain't wrote in my book. I (inaudible) now it's got to be wrote in the Lamb Book of Life if there's a book of remembrance, not wrote down like you're writing now. Now, you can do wrong. You can get off of the line. And as long as you're in Adams' flesh you're, uh, there's so much temptation moves along. No matter how much religion you got, if you see somebody abusing that young'em of yours, the devil will pop into you, hard to tell what you might do. Had a gun, you'd kill.

DL: Would you tell me why you like to gather ginseng?

EM: Uh, uh, I just like to be in the mount, go up in the mountains, uh, uh, looking for it. It's not the price of it. But you get a habit of it just like, uh, smoking or chewing tobacco or things that you pick up. I just, I just like to do that.

DL: How much was the most you ever got for ginseng?

EM: I, I believe I got, uh, seems to me like it was, uh, I got about, didn't I get about fifty two dollars worth one time?

OM: Seems like you took it to Virginia and got fifty two dollars when we was going to Poor Valley and took Bob Gross.

EM: I bought groceries with every bit.

DL: Who buys it?

EM: Uh, it was, uh, uh, I don't know what he get it, so much a pound and a fellow ask me, "Why do you like to ginseng?" "I just like to, Just like to do this," (inaudible). Sport. What you want to call it. And said, uh, "Why do you want to get out over the mountains that away." Said, "You don't have to." I said, "No, but I just like to do that." Just like you got something about you, now that you, that you like to do. Maybe yours is different than mine. And I just like to go.

DL: The people who buy this, are they doctors?

EM: Huh?

DL: The people who buy ginseng, are they doctors?

EM: Huh, uh. They buy it up and ship it.

OM: They ship it to New York, Dorothy Lou.

EM: And they tell me they ship it to China and Japan.

OM: They get about seventy five dollars a pound for it when they ship it. Big price.

DL: What do they use it for?

EM: Uh, it, uh, they use, uh, I just been told that some kind of dope. Smoke it or something over there. And the United States got so now they, they, they use it and they're getting tight on it. You, it's, uh, always has been a law. And this was, this was Virginia, it was cut off. You, you read history, you know, about how long it's been. A hundred year, ain't it?

DL: Yes, it was during the Civil War. Nineteen sixty three was (inaudible).

EM: Well the law was being adopted, and uh, on the books yet. A five dollar fine in Virginia it was to dig ginseng till the berries got red, and it's still law and they enforce it in Virginia. Got so (inaudible).

DL: You mean they have to dig it?

EM: No. I mean they, if you, if you dig it before the berries get red they can fine you five dollars. Uh, it may be ten now. I don't know. That's what the old law was. My daddy lives on Buckeye and he worked. Every citizen had to work on the county road ten days. Same law in Virginia now. Free. Didn't get anything for it. He worked on the roads here in West Virginia before he moved over on Virginia. I can't remember when, when he moved but I was born right in the head of Buckeye, and uh, same law over there. If you had a boy big enough to work, why you could send him in your place, or you could hire somebody. If you, every citizen paid tax had to work ten days every year on the old county road. In Kentucky, the same law. I remember right by a house, when you go out there, do you know where old man Arch Horne's place is?

DL: I don't think so.

EM: You ever been up, uh, top up there at (inaudible) gap and turn right handed down that ridge?

DL: Can't remember.

OM: I don't think she knows.

EM: You go this way you go to Jewel Ridge. You know that.

DL: Yes.

EM: Well, I was raised right down this ridge this away.

Well, there's a road comes off, comes off on Slate there at the mouth of Wolfpen. Always was an old wagon road to it. And they'd work on that road. My daddy worked on it and I was just a little boy, you know. I, they tore out rocks and, and, never did beat them old wagons, dig that out, you know. They never did be a rock in that hole. I've seen them get, uh, poles and put in it. It was in a little, uh, you couldn't, horses were small then. There wasn't no big horses, just little mules and scrub horses, little wagons that pull about five hundred pound up them mountains and around. I can remember my daddy (inaudible) barrel of flour, three dollars, hauled it in a sled and bought a wagon down on a sled, then took the sled and hauled home. Three dollars for a barrel of flour. I bought shirts fifteen cents a piece. First pair of shoes I ever wore was a homemade shoe. My daddy's cousin, he made them and then you get a, there's a brogan. You never did see them. And a dollar and a quarter a pair. And, uh, you put tacks some call them, they called them hobnails now. It's a round head tack. I've got some somewhere. And, uh, the first thing you done before you ever wore them, put, you have to put them tacks in. And you could wear them two year. Solid leather. Cowhide. Shoes ain't no count now. You go buy your shoe and get it wet and it about ruined.

DL: Okay. Would you, uh, tell me about your job in Woodman, Kentucky at the planing mill?

EM: I fired them boilers. That's three big boilers. Two of us. We fired two and kept one for emergency. There was three. We had to wash out on Sunday. Wash the boilers out. They got mud in them and things from the water, you know. And we'd cut one in, cut one of them out, and cut the other one in and kept two running all the time. They had pipes in a, they had lumber stacked, stacked lumber in a building and put sticks and turn them so there, so there was a little space there and they was on wheels and, uh, they'd close them doors and had pipes in there and fired them boilers and dry

that lumber and they'd saw off a little piece of it every once in a while and weigh it. Get all the moist out of it to make, oh, made all kinds of lumber. Shipped it to make furniture and everything and, uh, that's the reason they kept it running day and night. I worked on the night shift.

DL: Did you ever live in, uh, . .

EM: Log house?

DL: . . . camp, like a coal camp or . . .

EM: Yeah. Lived over here at Vera Poca. And a woman, her old girl hit Willa with a rock. My wife knocked her in the head and had to, she went to Kentucky and stayed till I got it fixed up. Hit Willa with a rock. Lord, it's awful to live in a coal camp.

DL: How's that?

EM: Just mixed every, young'ens and some be little and never took care of them. And just mean, worst place in the world. All kinds of people and a whole gang of young'ens. They'd fight and gom. Houses right together.

OM: Honey, do you want a cup of coffee or . . .

EM: Fix her something to eat when you get done.

OM: . . . pop or something?

DL: Did you have any friends that lived in the camp?

EM: Oh, yeah. Good. I always got along with most of my neighbors. Uh, hardly ever had any trouble. Uh, niggers was good. Now, they was a bunch of niggers. They lived in the lower end course to themselves and, uh, I want to tell you what happened to a nigger once. They worked in the mines, good, good people. They was some of the goodest colored fellows. I had pneumonia. They'd come here and visit me and one lived there eleven years. Brought

up there maybe two years, and got in this over here and bought this four acres here first. Then I bought Ira out, nine acres back there and then I bought eight acres off of the land company. Started in on this house.

DL: Could you tell me how you, uh, kept things from your garden fresh so you could have it during the winter?

EM: Yeah, (inaudible). Beans, cabbage, dried some kushaws and pumpkins, pickled the beans, made kraut. I killed my own hog and had the meat, took my corn to the mill on a horse and had my . . .

OM: Chickens and hams.

DL: How did you keep your potatoes?

EM: I put them in a hole in the ground. Never had no cellar not a basement. They won't keep on concrete no way. And I'd dig a hole in the ground and lay a boards or something over it and then put dirt in it. You can keep them. They're better too. New look about them. Now I put them down there.

DL: How did you keep your meat from spoiling?

EM: Salt it down. I had a meat house. Built it out there.

OM: Canned a big lot of it (inaudible).

EM: And you can it and you take and, uh, take you some boards and lay it down and lay, put a layer of salt there. Lay a, midlings, see, down on that, then cover it with salt and put another layer on it. Your hams, and uh, your midlings and salt it away and then, uh, whenever it took salt good, uh, you hung it up and that would, it would drip alot. That water in it would drip and you would keep the flies off it. The only way you could do it in the summer is take you a cloth, it wouldn't spoil if they took salt, and put it in and tie it to keep the flies from blowing it, you know. And your meat was good all summer (inaudible). But the best way

OM: We always had four rooms.

EM: Uh, had electric lights and they wasn't but a dollar.

OM: I believe eight dollars, seemed like.

EM: It was five or six. Nothing, nearly. Wasn't much. They was pretty good houses. They was throwed up and . . .

DL: Were they furnished?

EM: No.

OM: Yes, no.

EM: Huh, uh.

DL: Did they have a stove in them?

EM: Never had nothing. Some of them had grates. (Inaudible) we had a heating stove and them, uh, (inaudible) men was scarce. When I shipped my stuff to Iaeger and they hauled it up there and set it up for you and, uh, but the coal company wouldn't, if you left, they wouldn't, you had to get a wagon to haul it to where you shipped it. That was the only way you could move your stuff then. And, uh, they'd, uh, if they wanted you to work, they'd furnish a carpenter and help set up your furniture.

DL: Was there a company store at the camp?

EM: Yeah, we called it, yeah, a big store and, uh, they, uh, raised them up and mixed up that way and had no peace and trouble and aggravation. I said, "I'm going to get out." And when they come and shot a tunnel through this mountain up here and got this (inaudible) I was the oldest man of the job and they load over here and they bought some land off of this old man, Adam Lester, here, and I told him I wanted him to build me a house on that knoll up there at John Riffes'. They built that. I lived

to keep meat now, and it's just as good as yours from the time you put it in that can as it is the day you put it in. It's, put it in a tub, put in cans and put rags or cloth, something to separate the cans so they wouldn't touch one another. They bust if they do and cook that so long. Set it in your cellar or somewhere in a cool place and buddy, you can open it next summer and it's just as good as the day you put it in there. You had to do that then. Dry your beans. We'd dry beans, call them "shuck beans," and thrash some, and turnips, we'd holed them up, hanovers, dry your apples, cooked apples, and can them and dry them. You can live. If I was able I'd live without, you have to have sugar now. That's one thing, and salt, you have to buy that, can't uh, but now you can't, uh, meat. You got your lard, you got your vegetables, and you can live. If you could live back in them days, and live to be old. I had a, uh, a great uncle lived to a hundred and twelve. And he never died of no stomach trouble. Now you, they don't want me to eat this, two glasses of milk a day and Lord, Lord. The Lord had blessed me with a good stomach. I've used it eighty four years, that's pretty good. I eat anything, don't hurt me, but they want me to eat certain things. No, no salt (inaudible) taste like salt. I don't know what it is. Not, not, not too many eggs and cholestral and I (break in tape), in an old big iron skillet. And I, we'd eat cornbread. I can remember the first flour bread ever I eat. We eat cornbread three times a day. I've seen them take that cornbread after they'd eat breakfast and go to that skillet, sop in that grease and eat it. Didn't, didn't hurt them. And the vitamins, you got it out of the earth. Now, they fertilize the ground and the feed that comes out of that, they feed cows and they put, the milk you get about half milk. Now you can milk a cow, and we dig out a cellar in a bank, in the dirt. Made a (inaudible) of logs and covered it. Put a door or two. Keep your milk in there. It wouldn't spoil.

DL: Thank you very much, Mr. Mullins.